

makes me drink
4,5,6 cups of coffee,
then 4,5,6 cans of beer,
makes me pace from
room to room
picking up this book
or that object,
touching and probing
and tasting like a
blind man
searching for some
clue
of where he's at ...

And sometimes
I settle for cutting
my fingernails
that grow like new flowers
in spring,
impatient to be free ...

Aunt Ruth

When she was young,
she ran away with a man,
it was years ago,
she was stately
& well-educated
& stayed in the hotel room
for three weeks
before he left her.

Her stepfather
locked her in the attic
for a month when she returned,
& when she came down
she was a school teacher,
married a humble man
of Hungarian descent,
settled like concrete
in New England.

I never really knew her
till I was 18,
I was in the back of the car
defending people I knew
nothing about,
defending Beatniks
& the way they lived,
it was 1950 something-or-other,
Aunt Ruth was driving,
her knuckles white

where she gripped the wheel,
her face muscles twitching
like swimmer's cramps.
Our eyes met in the rearview mirror
& I shut up.

"They have no right,"
she said,
"They have no right to live
that way."

I found it hard to answer.

To All Who Would Know

-- a primer for Mel Lyman

I could tell you tales of broken nose
& twinkle toes
& non-chalant acceptance,

but rather let me say
that there is a hole in my kitchen wall
instead of my wife's face,
& I beat my child upon occasion
because of his existence;

and I drink to excess when I drink,
which is quite often ...

Margie & Arlene

lived just a few sand lots away,
were older than I was,
came by to play.

We'd go to the woods
& smoke,
I guess they were Tom Boys,
no one gave it much thought,
we'd smoke cigarettes
& show each other our things,
play doctor.

Once I broke Margie's head
pulling her on a sledge,
I remember running from the pond,
remember the puddle of blood that